

OLD SLEUTH'S OWN.

No. 128.

AN AMAZING WIZARD;

OR,

The Further Adventures of Fire Bomb Jack.

By OLD SLEUTH.



"I Arrest You."

NEW YORK:

AN AMAZING WIZARD:

OR

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF FIRE BOMB JACK.

By OLD SLEUTH.

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AN AMAZING WIZARD;

OR,

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF FIRE-BOMB JACK.

BY OLD SLEUTH,

Author of All the Famous Old Sleuth Stories.

CHAPTER I.

"I ARREST YOU!"—"DO YOU?"—A DETECTIVE'S SURPRISE—A
COLUMN OF SMOKE—A DISAPPEARANCE—SCREAMS AT MID-
NIGHT—FLIGHT OF A BEAUTY—INVESTIGATION—STRANGE
INCIDENTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

"I ARREST you!"

"Do you?"

The above brief colloquy occurred under very peculiar
circumstances.

A young man in the early morning was proceeding along the street when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, followed by the words:

"I arrest you!"

The next instant the man who had made the arrest sprang high into the air, and the party addressed in a laconic tone exclaimed: "*Do you?*"

The cause of the man's involuntary leap into the air was a sudden, a terrific explosion right under his feet.

There was no one near at the time, and as the man who had attempted to make the arrest landed on his feet after his wild leap he exclaimed:

"You scoundrel! would you murder me?"

"I will if you interfere with me, you rascal; how dare you arrest me?"

"I arrest you as a thief."

"Oh, you do."

Again there came an explosion under the man's feet and a second time he leaped into the air and uttered a yell of alarm, but when he the second time landed on his feet he attempted to draw a revolver. But bang, bang! flashed a light in his face followed by repeated explosions, and then suddenly the man was enveloped in a dense black smoke—so dense that he was like one stricken blind—and he stood wildly gesticulating without moving his feet. Suddenly the smoke cleared away, and the man he would have arrested had cleared away also.

The detective stood and gazed around in a dazed sort of way, and finally muttered:

"Well, that gets me; I am uninjured and yet I'll swear that rascal fired at me point blank, and then, hang it! I was stifled in smoke so dense I could not see an inch. I was like one stricken with blindness, and my prisoner has disappeared."

The circumstances which led up to the attempted arrest were very peculiar. A young man appearing like a tramp had just come forth from a house, but not in the usual way. He had leaped from a parlor window to the stoop and so had descended to the street. A detective chanced to be passing at the moment, and suspecting that the young man was a sneak thief had followed him and had attempted to make the arrest, and the incidents described followed.

The tramp after having disposed of the officer by enveloping him in a cloud of dense smoke through some phenomenal process, walked quietly away until he arrived at the corner of the adjoining cross street when he started on a run, and was soon beyond the possibility of capture, and a second notable incident followed. The seeming tramp with the celerity of a change artist worked a complete transform in his appearance. In place of the tramp a well dressed, bright-faced young man leisurely strolled along with an air as unconcerned as though he was on his way to his business.

The young man was a very remarkable character, and to those of our readers who have not read the narrative of his former adventures, we will state that his name was Jack Westlake. He was the son of an American who had long resided in India, and he had from his earliest years been the *protégé* of an old East Indian necromancer, and in time had become more expert than his master. Upon the death of his father Jack Westlake had returned to America possessed of a large fortune, and had amused himself by a continuous exercise of his marvelous magical accomplishments in running down thieves and performing extraordinary tricks. He was the inventor of several electrical and chemical contrivances which enabled him to perform all manner of wonderful feats, including the

power to create machine lightning flashes and explosions in mid-air, or at any given point at will. He had a friend, Tom Wakefield, a youth about his own age, whose acquaintance he had made under exciting circumstances, and the two young men had become the closest of companions, dwelling together in a house belonging to Jack. Jack had passed through several exciting adventures, as related in Number 127 of "Old Sleuth's Own," and at the time of his re-introduction to our readers he was engaged in the solution of a very strange mystery, and was calling to his aid all his wizard tricks in order to run down the true facts of a very remarkable incident and possible murder, and it was while thus engaged that he ran across the detective who had seen him leave a dwelling house at an early hour in the morning.

As related, after his adventure with the detective, and after having worked a transform, Fire-Bomb Jack, as his friend Tom had dubbed him, proceeded along leisurely to his home, and as he had been out all night he sought his bed and needed sleep and rest.

About a month had passed succeeding Jack's adventures as related in our previous narrative, when a startling adventure occurred, which was to be succeeded by a series of thrilling incidents.

The hour was after midnight. Jack had been on a prowl looking for some adventure and had stopped a moment to watch the course of a meteor darting across the heavens when he was startled by hearing a shrill scream which issued from a house one door removed from the dwelling before which he was standing. He stood and listened. There was a street lamp, directly in front of the house where as he determined the scream had come, and he was studying the exterior when the street door opened and a female richly dressed and with a face like

death darted forth, ran down the stoop, and continued her flight up the street.

Aided by the street lamp Jack was able to mark the items recorded. The girl was refined-looking; her face was like a corpse, showing that she had encountered some terrible shock, and her clothing was rich.

"Well," muttered the young man, "what does that mean?"

He did not attempt to pursue the girl, but stood for a moment revolving the incident in his mind, and then after a little he walked directly in front of the house and studied it more closely, and again he muttered:

"I wonder what that meant? There is something wrong. Hang me! if I don't follow the girl and force her to tell me what terrified her so."

He ran forward in the direction the girl had taken, but she had disappeared very strangely after turning the corner of the first street.

Again Jack muttered:

"Hang me! it is all very singular. I am going to follow this thing up and investigate. The scream came from that house and then the girl ran out and it is certain that something happened to scare the life almost out of her. It may have been merely an altercation or the sudden illness of one of the inmates, and the girl may have run for a doctor. And then again, it may be some piece of villainy that is being perpetrated; you never can tell in this great city of New York. Anyhow I propose to investigate, that is what I am prowling around for, an adventure, and possibly I've struck one right here."

Little did the young man dream of the really startling adventure he had struck, but he was to learn within a few moments, for he was persistent and daring and always prepared to take chances.

The girl having disappeared, Jack returned to the house to investigate.

He peeped in the basement windows. All was dark as he expected. He ascended the stoop and peeped in the parlor windows, and again all was dark. He tried the street door; it was but partly closed, and he had only to shove gently and it yielded. The girl in her flight had not closed it behind her. Jack appreciated the chances he was taking, but his curiosity was fully aroused and he pushed the door open, entered the hall and closed the door behind him, and it closed with a snap; he had cut off practically a quick retreat.

Once inside he stood and listened, and was more and more bewildered. Not a sound broke the stillness; there were no lights; all was still and dark.

"I am sure," he muttered, "I am in the house from which the girl darted forth. I have the confirmation of the open door, and now what could have scared that girl? Why did she rush forth, her face white with terror?"

Jack waited some little time; he desired to make sure that no one was lying in wait. Even in the darkness he had become conscious that he was standing on an uncarpeted floor, and this was a singular incident considering the fact that the girl had rushed forth.

After a little our hero drew his little masked lantern, and sliding the mask he looked around with the aid of the light. The house as far as he could see bore the evidence of being unoccupied. There was no hall carpet, the stairs were bare, and he saw no furniture. Cautiously he moved forward to the parlor door and let the gleam from his light flash ahead, and, lo, there was no carpet on the parlor floor, nor any furniture whatever. He became more and more bewildered. What could a girl be doing in that unfurnished, unoccupied house at

such an hour, and what had happened to cause her to rush forward as he had seen her do?

"There is a mystery here somewhere," he muttered; "I am glad I came in."

Jack was very deliberate in all his movements. He was without fear and had determined to make a thorough investigation. He advanced into the parlor and proceeded to a point near the half-closed folding doors separating the front parlor from the rear room.

Jack was going around in an inquiring sort of way, not expecting to discover anything very startling when his eye fell on an object that caused him to recoil and turn pale. He was nervy, brave, and cool under ordinary circumstances, but what he saw so suddenly would have caused the bravest and coolest to quail momentarily.

On the center of the floor in the rear room was a bier, and on the bier was what appeared to be a coffin with a black robe thrown over it.

Here was a mystery. It was not strange to find a coffin in a house, but it was strange to find one in a dwelling which was apparently unoccupied. Jack stood a moment gazing at the suggestive sight, and believing that he had solved the mystery of the girl's terror, the one whom he had seen rush from the house; he determined to retire, despite the fact that there was a strange suggestiveness in his discovery. He did not act quickly, however, and having recovered from his shock upon the first discovery, he finally determined as long as he was in the house and had made the discovery to investigate further. He advanced beside the bier, pulled off the robe and saw a handsome velvet-lined coffin, and he also discovered that the lid, although in place, was unscrewed. He determined to see the dead face and removed the headpiece, when with a cry of amazement he sprang back shaking like an aspen leaf.

CHAPTER II.

**● THRILLING DISCOVERY—A DEAD BEAUTY IN THE COFFIN—
A FURTHER INVESTIGATION—A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE
—BAFFLED IN EVERY DIRECTION—A POSSIBLE CRIME.**

It was not fear that caused Jack to leap back and tremble, it was excitement and amazement. He had flashed his light inside the coffin; under its bright glare was revealed the face of a beautiful girl not over seventeen or eighteen, and the face was cold and calm and beautiful in death.

Jack speedily recovered his self-command sufficiently to step again beside the coffin, and he gazed long and steadfastly at the dead face. Here was a mystery indeed, this beautiful girl lying cold in death in all her original beauty, still unmarred by the destroying processes of death—yes, reposing in an elegant coffin and in a house evidently unoccupied, and from this house our hero had seen a living girl run screaming, her face white with terror. All the incidents were strange, weird, and unaccountable.

Reverently Jack restored the coffin lid. He threw the robe over the coffin and bier and walked away, and as he did so he muttered:

“I am going to learn what this all means; it may be all right, it may be all wrong; but it looks as though something wrong was in progress.

Jack determined to go through the house and learn if there were any occupants. It did not seem possible that a dead girl could be lying there and no one near. He passed out to the hall and slowly ascended the stairs to the second floor. He entered both the front and rear rooms and found them bare; no furniture, no carpet. He

ascended to the third story and found the same conditions. He moved very slowly and finally sat down on the broad window base on the third floor and meditated. He was seeking to solve in his mind the possibilities that might explain the mystery. He did not note how long he had been upstairs, but after a time descended again to the parlor floor, re-entered the rear parlor intending to again glance at the features of the dead girl when he encountered the surprise of his life. The coffin, the bier, the grave cloth, everything had disappeared; the rear room contained nothing more than the front room. The coffin containing the body of the dead girl had been removed quietly and secretly, and here was a mystery added to a mystery. Where had the body been taken? Where had the parties been while he was examining the dead face? He must have been seen from some secret place; some one must have been watching his every movement, and the body had quickly and silently been removed as stated.

Jack stood lost in amazement, then carefully he gazed around seeking some indication of the presence of those who had removed the corpse. He saw no indications, everything had been carried away, and not a sign had been left behind.

"Well," he soliloquized after a few moments' meditation, "I suspected there was something wrong and now I know there has been some wrongdoing. Alas! in this great city of New York, as in other great cities all over the world, strange deeds are constantly in progress. Why this dead girl in this unoccupied house? Why this secret and silent removal? Why did that fair girl whom I saw rush forth scream and take to flight? What does it all mean, and where has the body been taken to? Here is a quest for me—the strangest quest of my life—but as I live I will solve this mystery."

Jack commenced a search; he was convinced the body had not been carried out of the front door. "It may have been removed to some other room," he muttered.

Jack passed carefully while on his guard through every room in the house. He discovered nothing, not the slightest indication. He descended to the basement floor and there also was baffled. He went down into the cellar and still not a clue as to the whereabouts of the body was his reward.

"Hang it!" he muttered, "this mystery grows deeper and deeper."

Jack stepped out into the yard and examined the rear of the house—examined as far as he could the two adjoining houses—everything about the latter appeared all right and he found no indications, and again he muttered:

"How in thunder they could have carried that body so silently and secretly I cannot tell. They have not left a track behind them; it is as though they had simply floated into the air and sailed away through space."

Jack found daylight approaching at last and made up his mind to get away. He did not depart from the house though the door for reasons that he could never explain, but opened the front window and leaped to the stoop and descended to the street in that way, and thus it was that the passing detective discovered him, and the incident followed with which we open our narrative.

Jack upon arriving at his home went straight to his room and retired as we have recorded, and he slept far into the day. He needed rest and took it; but some time after dinner he arose and met his friend Tom Wakefield and the latter said:

"Jack, you did not come in until morning."

"No."

"You must have met with an adventure."

"I did."

"Well, you are always looking for one."

"I am."

"Was it a startler?"

"It was."

"Can I hear about it?"

"You can."

"I am listening."

Jack told his story, told how he had spent the better part of the night on a quest, the purpose of which was known to Tom, and then related the story of the fleeing girl, and his ghastly discovery in the unoccupied house.

Tom listened with great interest and finally asked:

"Are you sure you had this experience?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean you must have become fatigued, sat down somewhere, and had a strange dream."

Jack laughed and said:

"It would seem like a dream, but my tale is true. I did not dream, I did not sleep; I have written upon my memory every detail of my adventure."

"It does not seem possible that they could have removed the coffin and you not have heard them, for under any circumstances there must have been more than one engaged in the affair."

"Yes, there was more than one, and it is a conspiracy of some kind, possibly a murder; and the most mysterious part of it to me is the flight of the living girl from the house. What could she have been doing in that house with the dead, and what was the sudden shock that caused her to scream and flee?"

"Did you see her flee?"

"I did."

"You would recognize her if you saw her again?"

‘I would.’

‘Then it is in finding that fleeing girl that you will solve the mystery.’

‘You are right; and that is just what I have decided to do: find that fleeing girl if I can and learn from her the cause of her flight from that house.’

Jack gave a great deal of thought to the singular incidents that had come under his observation. He felt assured, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that he had stumbled on to a tragic mystery.

Later in the day our hero paid a visit to the vicinity of the house where he had discovered the corpse which had been so mysteriously “sneaked away,” as he put it, and as he dwelt on the matter he determined that his presence in the house must have been discovered and his movements watched.

Jack made a careful survey of the exterior of the two adjoining houses, and being under a disguise he determined to make inquiries. The houses appeared to be occupied by reputable people; there were servants, and everything appeared to proceed in a conventional manner. He lay around until he saw a servant issue from one of the houses and proceed to the corner grocery. He followed, and addressing the girl when opportunity offered, he said:

“Hello, Bridget, I haven’t seen you for a long time.”

The girl turned and eyed him critically and said:

“Ye hev made a mistake.”

“Hev I indade, thin it’s queer if I have. Shure, didn’t I know ye whin I wer’ on this beat.”

“An’ is it a policeman ye are?”

“It’s a policeman I was, but shure hard luck has overtaken me.”

“If I ever knew ye, shure your face has passed from me mimory entirely.”

"No doubt."

We will here state that Jack had the girl's name all right, for just as Bridget had stepped forth another girl living in the house had called her back, naming her as Bridget, so our hero had that end of it down all right. The girl was not over bright, and Jack did not linger on the question of identification, but proceeded to tell his own tale of woe in order to excite her sympathy and attention, and he related:

"Ye see, I was removed from this post and put down in a bad neighborhood, and one night there was a gang of ruffians made an assault upon a young girl and I went to her rescue, and the gang set upon me and I was badly beaten and laid up, although I had fought them to the best of me ability, and while I wer' sick in me bed from the wounds I had received they started false charges agin me. I was tried by the commissioners and lost me badge only five days ago, after I hed come out from the hospital, and I wer left penniless and in debt and widout a home or money, and I've no relations on this side; all me friends are in Ireland and it's a bad way I am in, and I've come around to me old beat to see if I cannot get some of the gintlemen living here to get me back me position. There was one gintleman living in the house next to where you live. Shure, it's there I thought he wer' living, and I wer' seeking to get speech wid him whin I saw you come forth."

"The gentleman who was living in that house has moved away."

"He has?"

"Yes."

"How long since?"

"Oh, it's six months ago."

"Dear me, and I kin get no trace of him."

"Ye may, but I can't aid ye; but do ye moind there has been strange things going on in that house."

"There has?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"For the last two or three days."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"I am interested, seeing as I once knew the gintleman that did live there."

"Well, there has been people in that house; I don't think any one has noticed it but me yet, but I've seen two men going in and out and do ye moind many queer things hev happened I believe. Shure, the other night I were looking out of me window about midnight when I saw a carriage stop over beyond there, and some men got out of the carriage and I saw them go into the house."

"And did ye spake of it?"

"I did not."

"And why not?"

"Shure, I had no reason to know that there was anything wrong going on, but I had me suspicion all the same."

"And did ye see anything else?"

"No, but I hev been on the watch, and I am sure there has been people in the house late at night as well as in the daytime."

Jack got into very friendly talk with the girl Bridget, as indicated, and learned a great many facts from her, but none directly bearing upon the mystery, and he was still engaged conversing with Bridget when he saw a veiled girl pass him, and being on the outlook for any strange incidents he watched the veiled girl, and noticed that she lessened her speed when passing the vacant house, and she appeared to be watching it very closely.

"I will meet ye again," said Jack to the girl Bridget, "and let ye know if I succeed in getting me place back, and I am thankful to you for tellin' me about the vacant house. Shure there may be something strange going on there, and if I kin learn anything interesting to the police I may get back me position, and it's to you I'll owe me good fortune, and it's good-day to ye. But don't say a word to any one that I wer' talking to ye, and if I learn anything I'll let ye know. Shure, it's a good turn ye may hev done me in confiding to me, and me name is Mike Duggan, and it's grateful I am to ye indade."

Bridget went on to the store and our hero lay low to watch the movements of the veiled girl.

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY—A SPY IN THE VACANT HOUSE—WHERE SHE LIVED
—LYING IN WAIT—A MIDNIGHT FOLLOWING—AT THE
VACANT HOUSE AGAIN—A BOLD ACCOUNTING—A CURIOUS
DIALOGUE.

THE girl walked past the house and then turned and repassed it. There was no question as to her interest in the vacant house, and our hero was led to suspect that she was the girl whom he had seen rush from that house at midnight. The girl's actions were certainly very peculiar; she stepped over to the opposite side of the street and walked backward and forward several times, and then apparently fearing that she might attract attention, she walked away, traveled around the square, but returned and fixed her eyes from under the veil on the

vacant house, and she repeated her maneuvers for at least three hours, and during all that time in a careful and most skillful manner Jack watched her; and when she moved away he followed her and traced her to a very respectable house in the upper part of the city. He at once in his own way began to make inquiries concerning the house he had seen her enter, and learned that it was a very respectable boarding house, a dwelling with its inmates above suspicion.

Having learned these facts Jack walked away, worked a change in his appearance—a very easy trick for him—and one, as our readers know, that is practiced every day—indeed, the matter of disguise has become a very common and ordinary event, and it is remarkable how easy it is for one to change their appearance.

Having worked his transform, Jack returned to the vicinity of the boarding house and lay around for several hours, but saw nothing of the young lady. He knew she was young from her movements, and as intimated he strongly suspected that she was the girl he had seen fleeing from the vacant house, and he further believed that she was in some way connected with what he had reason to suspect was a tragic incident.

After having hung around for several hours Jack walked away, but determined to return at night and lie in wait and learn if the girl came forth after nightfall. He hung around until near midnight when his vigilance and patience were rewarded. He saw a female issue forth from the boarding house, and concluded that it was the party he had “shadowed” earlier in the day. He fell to the woman’s trail and lo, she proceeded direct to the vacant house, and the hour was near midnight; and he saw her resume her maneuvers as she had figured when he first recognized that she had an interest in the house in which he had seen the dead beauty.

An hour passed; the veiled woman made no effort to enter the house, but merely moved around from place to place in the vicinity; but it was very evident that she was watching it closely. Jack determined to address her, and he advanced and said:

"Good-evening, miss."

The woman uttered a cry and stood still, gazing at him from under her veil.

"Do not be frightened, miss, but I fear it is necessary for me to have a few moments' conversation with you."

"I do not understand, sir, why you should address me."

"I think I can attract your interest and explain why I address you."

"It is possible you have made a mistake."

"No, I have not made a mistake in one direction."

Jack was amazed that the veiled woman exhibited so little evidence of fear; she talked to him in firm tones.

"You say you can attract my interest?"

"I can."

"Do so."

"You are watching the house No. —."

The woman gave a start.

"Go on," she said in a quick tone.

"I am also watching that house."

"Indeed."

"I am and I will be perfectly frank with you."

"Do so."

"I had occasion to enter that house last night, just after midnight."

The woman betrayed considerable excitement but made no remark, and Jack continued:

"Yes, I entered that house after midnight and made a most thrilling and startling discovery."

"Indeed?"

"The house, as you know, is unfurnished."

"As I know?"

"Yes."

"Oh, certainly, you have just told me it is unfurnished."

Jack did not comment upon the evasion, but said:

"I repeat, I made a startling discovery."

"Can I ask what you discovered?"

"I discovered a coffin in that house, and in the coffin was the body of a once beautiful woman."

The veiled woman uttered an exclamation, but made no comment.

"You, miss, knew of the corpse being in that house; you know possibly the facts that led to the carrying of that dead woman into an unfurnished house, and you know why, in the most mysterious manner, that corpse was removed."

"I know nothing about it."

"Do you mean to tell me you did not behold that corpse?"

"Will you tell me who you are and why you talk to me in this strange manner?"

"I will on one condition."

"Name your condition."

"I must see your face; then I will tell you the whole truth."

"If I were to show you my face you would be more greatly mystified."

"I would?"

"You would."

"Will you show me your face and permit me to be mystified?"

The veiled woman appeared to meditate a moment, and then said:

"Our meeting is a strange one."

"Not at all; I sought you, I've been watching you."

"Watching me?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"Because I have good reason to suspect that you can throw some light on the mystery."

"Are you interested in the mystery?"

"I am."

"How?"

"I will tell you after I have seen your face."

"Why is it so necessary to see my face?"

"I will explain that also afterward. I intend to be perfectly frank with you if you will permit me; I also hope you will be perfectly frank with me."

"Come," said the veiled woman, and she stepped under a street lamp, and removing her veil disclosed her face under the clear light from a street lamp. Jack at a glance recognized the girl whom he had seen fleeing from the house, and he more particularly noted her strange beauty.

"Are you satisfied?"

"I am."

"Will you now tell me why you are interested in this mystery?"

"I will. I was passing that house yonder about midnight when I overheard a succession of screams, and an instant later I saw a young woman rush from the house and disappear. I saw that her face was white with terror; I am of an investigating turn of mind and I sought to learn what had occurred in the house to cause her flight. I was led step, by step owing to certain peculiar conditions, and finally entered the house through the door which you had left ajar. Once in the house I

discovered that it was an unfurnished building. That struck me as very queer; I followed up and discovered a bier with a velvet pall thrown over it. I was amazed; I stepped beside the bier, raised the pall and discovered the coffin. I removed the lid and beheld the face of a woman who had been beautiful in life. Then I determined to investigate still further; I ascended to the upper floors of the house. I was absent from the parlor floor about half an hour; when I returned the bier, the coffin, and indeed all the funeral paraphernalia had most singularly and mysteriously disappeared."

The girl listened with absorbed attention while Jack was truthfully relating all the facts that had won his interest in the strange circumstances, and when he had concluded she asked:

"Are you sure you have not been dreaming?"

"I am sure."

"You really saw a coffin in that house?"

"I did."

"First you saw a lady run from the house?"

"I did."

"And that led you to enter?"

"Yes."

"And then you made the strange discovery?"

"Yes."

"It is all very strange."

"Yes, it is all very strange; and now what light can you throw upon the mystery, for *you* were in that house, *you* saw the corpse, and in alarm *you* rushed forth."

"I cannot throw any light on the dark affair."

"I did think you would be as frank as I have been, for I have told you all the facts in a truthful manner."

"I believe you have."

"You will admit you were in that house?"

"I was."

"Then why did you ask me if I had been dreaming?"

"I merely desired to learn what answer you would make, that is all. Now tell me who you are—a detective, or are you a party to the mystery?"

"I am not a detective, I am not a party to the mysterious incidents."

"And who are you?"

"Simply what you behold; a young man of an inquisitive turn of mind, who attracted by his curiosity was led into the discovery that I have related to you."

"And you know nothing more than what you have related?"

"I know nothing more, but I am determined to probe this affair to the bottom and learn all the facts."

"Why?"

"Because I am convinced that some crime has been committed."

CHAPTER IV.

"WE ARE WATCHED"—"I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE 'SHADOWER'"—

A DETECTIVE GETS A SURPRISE—A POSTPONED NARRATIVE—

A SECOND SURPRISE FOR A DETECTIVE—FROM DARKNESS TO A

DAZZLING LIGHT—A MEETING IN THE DARK—SUSPICIONS.

AGAIN the girl meditated, and Jack interrupting her meditations said:

"Now it is your turn to give me some information, for you certainly can throw some light on this mystery, as I said."

"I cannot; it is a mystery to me."

"You were in that house?"

"I have admitted I was there."

"Will you tell me how it was that you were in the house and know nothing about the circumstances?"

"I do not believe you would accept my narrative were I to relate the real facts."

"Yes, I would accept your narrative."

"It is a very strange one."

"Relate the facts to me."

"I am a stranger here in this city, that is, a comparative stranger."

"But you were in that house?"

"I was."

"I ask you to tell me how it was you were there and unable to throw any light on the mystery."

"I must first relate some facts concerning myself. I do not know that I am wise in so doing."

"Why not?"

"You are a stranger to me."

"I am, but I am an honorable man."

"I am convinced that you are. But come, we have attracted attention; there is a man watching us."

"Yes, I observed him."

"He may be 'shadowing' us."

"Have you anything to fear?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I will explain later; but we had better walk away."

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere; I feel safe in going with you."

"I am glad, but how have I won your confidence?"

"By your absolute truthfulness; I know you told me the truth about the discovery of the dead woman. Again, I must trust some one; you are acquainted with enough

facts for me to accept you as my confidant, especially since, as I have said, I believe you have told the truth. I feel that some great crime is being committed in New York; I believe that house is associated with the crime. The police should be informed; I dare not inform the police. I will tell you certain very startling facts under a promise that you do not involve me; but there is a mystery here greater than you at present suspect. We will walk away and learn if that man follows us."

"You are a very cool, bright, and courageous young woman; we will walk away."

Jack and the young lady did walk away but very soon discovered that they were being followed, and our hero said:

"That man is following us."

"Yes, and he is very open about it."

"I can throw him off our track; I will if you will promise not to desert me."

"I will not desert you; I am as anxious to exchange experiences with you as you are to exchange them with me. I repeat, I have a very startling story to tell."

"You walk on, await me a square or two from here. I will rejoin you; keep straight along on this street; I do not wish it to happen that we miss each other; it is important I should hear your narrative."

The young lady walked on and Jack turned back to meet the man who had been "shadowing" him. The man did not attempt to evade our hero, and Jack approached straight to him and said:

"My friend, you have been 'dogging' me."

"I have," came the prompt admission.

"Why have you done so?"

"I am not satisfied as to your movements. What is it that you and that veiled woman are up to?"

"It is none of your business."

"Then I shall be compelled to make it my business. You will give me a satisfactory explanation or I shall arrest you."

"Oh, you are an officer?"

"No matter who or what I am; I will do as I said."

"Then listen to me, officer or no officer, you go off about your business or you will regret it."

"You speak boldly."

"It is my right."

"Then it is my right to demand an answer to my question, or I shall arrest you."

"Oh, no."

"You are my prisoner."

"Don't attempt to arrest me."

"You are my prisoner; you will go with me."

"Not one step."

The man drew a club and advanced toward Jack when suddenly there came a flash and the officer was enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke—so dense that he could neither see to the right nor to the left—and the volume of smoke increased and covered a circular space more than fifty feet across. It was a most singular and extraordinary occurrence; one can readily imagine that the officer was confused, he did not know which way to turn. He did not attempt to emerge from the dense volume of smoke, but he was confused and bewildered. In about five minutes, however, the smoke drifted away and the officer could see in every direction, but the party to whom he had been talking—indeed, whom he had been "shadowing"—had strangely disappeared. The officer stood alone; he looked up and down the street, but nowhere was there a person in sight.

"Well," ejaculated the officer, "that beats me. Where

in thunder did that dense volume of smoke come from? One thing is certain, that fellow took advantage of it and has gotten away."

Such was the fact; the instant the smoke had commenced to envelop the officer Jack started on a run, soon overtook the young lady, and said:

"Come, we will get out of sight as soon as possible; we have a few moments and I do not believe that man will find us again."

The girl laughed in a merry way, and said:

"This is all a very thrilling experience for me, but circumstances have led me along, and for the last two days I have been the central figure in several startling experiences. I do not know where it will end."

"We want a long talk together. You do not fear me; you can trust me; I have a proposition: we will go to a hotel restaurant; it is not yet midnight; we can have a late supper and talk the whole matter over."

"No, I cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"I do not dare."

"Then you do not have that faith in me you said you had."

"I have. Let me see, I will go home and we will meet to-morrow, then we can talk at our leisure."

Jack meditated a moment, and said:

"I believe after all that will be the best plan; you will not fail to meet me?"

"I will not."

"Where shall we meet?"

"In Central Park, on one of the seats near the Fifty-ninth Street entrance, then we can stroll over to some nook where I can tell you my story and relate my extraordinary experience."

"That is our wisest plan; I will accompany you to your home."

Jack did accompany the young lady to her home, and before parting asked:

"Will you tell me your name?"

"You can know me as Miss Sara Smyth."

"And I am Jack Reed," said our hero, and he arranged the hour when they were to meet on the morrow, and bade the young lady good-night.

Our hero was puzzled by the strange incidents that had attended him, and as he walked away he muttered:

"I believe that young lady is honest, but ginger! what an odd adventure I am having."

Jack was proceeding along lost in deep thought when suddenly he felt a hand clapped on his shoulder and a voice said:

"Well, we meet again, and our meeting this time will not end in smoke."

"Oh, my friend, it is you. Well, that was funny how that cloud fell over us. I wandered out of it, and as I had no special business with you I went off and attended to my own business. But, hello! what's the matter now?"

The officer on the previous occasion had been enveloped in smoke; but as Jack exclaimed "Hello," the officer was in the midst of a dazzling ray of light that fairly blinded him. The amazing wizard had reversed the character of his trick and had blinded his man not with smoke but with a light so dazzling the man was as blind as a bat.

As our readers know, Jack was a wonderful wizard and capable of performing the most remarkable tricks and creating the startling phenomena.

While the officer stood blinded in the midst of the dazzling light Jack coolly walked off, and when the light

disappeared and the officer could see things around him once again, he muttered:

"I am awake that's sure, but it does appear as though I had run up against the devil, or the king of all wizards." He looked around but Jack was *non est*. He had slid away as adroitly as when some little time previously he had bewildered the officer in a cloud of smoke.

On the morning following the incidents we have related Jack was on hand at the time named, and there, without any veil and very neatly attired, was the strange girl Sara Smyth.

She smiled pleasantly as Jack approached, and looked very charming indeed.

"You are a little late," she said, and at once arose prepared to accompany Jack, and as she did so she remarked:

"This is indeed a very singular experience for me, but I rather like the novelty of it."

"So do I," said Jack, for he was really charmed. At the same time we will here state that he was on his guard. He was well aware that beautiful women are sometimes arch connivers and intriguantes; he knew this girl had been in that house; he suspected a crime was in progress. It was possible that despite her screams and her terror she might be one of the conspirators, if there was a conspiracy in progress. She certainly was too cool and self-reliant, as he believed, for an ordinary person, and he had evidence that she was more than a pretty, conventional girl. She met extraordinary adventures with wonderful coolness. She possessed great courage to venture out at night to investigate, as claimed; she showed courage in meeting him. He was a handsome fellow, and he had met her as Jack Reed, under no disguise whatever.

Together Jack and Miss Smyth walked away toward

the upper lake, and taking a side path soon arrived at a retired spot where there was a rustic seat, and she said:

"We will sit down here and discuss our mystery."

"Yes," acquiesced Jack.

"You saw me leave that house?"

"I did."

"Prior to seeing me rush out you heard me scream?"

"I presume you are the one who screamed."

"Yes, I did scream; and I rushed forth in wild terror just as you described, and as I promised last night I will tell you my history before I relate the strange circumstances which led up to what you saw."

Miss Smyth was perfectly cool as she proceeded with her explanations.

"You see," resumed the girl, "that I am about to be as frank as you were last night."

"I am glad."

"I believed your story, you must believe mine."

"I expect to do so."

In truth, however, Jack was becoming exceedingly suspicious despite the beauty and seeming frankness of Miss Smyth. He was almost as greatly mystified by her as he had been by the strange incidents which had led to his acquaintance with her.

"I was born up in the State of New York. My father was a banker and quite a rich man, and he lavished a great deal of money on my education, for I was his only daughter. Living in our town was a family who were our equals in wealth and social standing, and a member of that family, quite a fashionable young man, paid me special attentions. For reasons not necessary to state I despised him, and did not encourage his attentions to me, and after some time he went abroad and I was glad, as I was relieved of his attentions. And so matters went on

until one evil day trouble arose. It was discovered that a defalcation had occurred in the bank; circumstances pointed toward my father as having been in collusion with the men who robbed the bank. He was innocent, but he turned over every dollar of his private fortune to make up the deficiency, and then poor dear father, borne down under the humiliation and excitement, fell a victim to a disease that had long inflicted him, and I was left a penniless orphan."

A moment Miss Smyth who had spoken rapidly ceased speaking, and Jack could see tears welling in her beautiful eyes.

CHAPTER V.

A SINCERE GIRL—A LIFE HISTORY—THE ANSWER TO AN "AD"
—MEETING IN THE VACANT HOUSE—A THRILLING TALE—
EVIDENCES OF A SERIES OF TERRIBLE CRIMES—A COMPACT
—"I WILL SOLVE THIS MYSTERY."

JACK saw something more than the tears in those eyes; he beheld an expression of sincerity and tenderness on that beautiful face which disarmed all suspicion. He had learned within a few moments to believe in the honesty and sincerity of the lovely girl who was under such strange circumstances telling him her life history."

A moment only did Miss Smyth give way to the emotions she was evidently seeking to suppress, and she proceeded with her narrative:

"Yes, within a few days I was hurled down from a position of affluence to a condition of poverty. Had my father lived he would have regained his financial position;

but death claimed him and I was left a penniless orphan. I was not entirely deserted by my friends; I met with a great deal of sympathy and kindness on every hand, and among others who were very good to me was the mother of the young man whose attentions I had so scornfully rejected. Strange as it may appear, I have no relatives with whom I am acquainted. I know that my father has a brother living somewhere, but we have not heard from him in many years. As I've said, Mrs. Littleton was very sympathetic, and when the full measure of the financial disaster became known she offered me a position in her home as governess to her children. I was glad to accept the position and was proud to be earning my own livelihood, when lo, her son, Tom Littleton, whom I had rejected as a suitor, returned, and taking advantage of my changed position began to annoy me. He became bolder and bolder, and finally actually insulting, and then I made up my mind to give up my position. I did so, and about three months ago I came to New York. I had a little money and a splendid stock of clothing remaining from our days of affluence; I also owned a few valuable jewels. I came to New York hoping to obtain a position as teacher in the public schools; I have not succeeded, and a week ago I determined if possible to secure a position as governess, or one as companion to some lady as reader. So you see, Mr. Reed, that up to a comparatively few hours ago my experience has been ordinary and conventional, and I know you believe the story that I have told you. Whether or not you will as readily accept the tale I now have to tell, I cannot decide."

Jack was charmed, and he did believe every word of the tale that had been related to him, and he so said and added:

"Miss Smyth, I shall accept as true anything that you may relate to me."

"You are certainly very confiding, especially after having discovered a young woman running around at midnight, her face hidden behind a veil, and one who has made a confidant of a stranger. But, sir, in this city I am friendless; I have only passing friends. I am residing in a boarding house and have held myself aloof from my fellow boarders to such a degree that I am conscious that various stories are in circulation concerning me. The landlady to a certain extent has enjoyed my confidence; I was forced to make a confidant of her, partially in self-defense, and she has been very kind and considerate. I am naturally courageous and self-reliant, and my experience during the last two years has made me specially so, and that will account for my lack of the timidity that you might expect to find in a young lady who is just twenty; but adversity makes one self-reliant, and adversity has been my instructor. I am discerning, and I have trusted you simply on my own judgment as to your honor and sincerity."

"I can say without any vanity that your judgment and discernment have not misled you," was our hero's comment.

"You have through accident identified yourself with an incident in my career. I must make a confidant of some one and you are the one I shall trust, and to you I will relate my strange adventure."

"And you will never regret your confidence in me."

"As I told you I advertised for a position as governess or companion, and I received an answer to my advertisement requesting me to call at the house from which you saw me escape. I was requested to call in the evening as the party could not conveniently see me at any other time, and in the note I was informed that in case my services were required a very agreeable and satisfactory

arrangement would be made. I was delighted to receive this note, and knowing that I was capable of fulfilling any duty within the scope of my advertisement, at about seven o'clock in the evening I started forth."

"Did you not inform any one where you were going?"

"I did not."

"You should have done so."

"I know now that I was very rash."

"You were."

"I went to the house and of course was very nervous. I had arrayed myself in my best attire knowing the advantage of first impressions, especially on the part of a certain class of fashionable people. In answer to my ring a maid appeared at the door. She looked like a negro woman; I am now satisfied, however, that she was not; I was too nervous at the moment to note anything particularly. Upon opening the door the maid asked me in broken English:

" 'Are you the young lady who was to call?'

"I answered that I was, and the woman said:

" 'We are cleaning house and all the carpets are up. I hope you will overlook the fact, but as my mistress is going abroad she desired to see you at once.'

"The girl did not use the exact language, but what I have repeated is the substance of her statement. I felt a little shocked, but after all there was nothing specially unusual in the fact of the bare floors especially as the lady I was to meet was about to go abroad. I was led into the front parlor and a chair was provided for me by the maid, and she said she would summon her mistress. My first inclination was to slip out of the house and go away without seeing the lady, for I had begun to grow very suspicious; but a moment later, and ere I had fully determined, an elderly lady entered the room. She was

pleasant spoken and made more reasonable excuse for the fact that the house was bare. She said that she had stored her furniture away, to the fact that she was going abroad and had only remained in the house to meet me, and she took a seat near me on the only other chair there was in the room. She asked me a great many questions and soon I felt myself growing very drowsy. It was the most singular sensation I ever experienced, and then, alas! all recollection ceased. I now know that I became unconscious; how long I remained so I can only judge by calculating the time I entered the house and the time I left it, but I did return to consciousness, awoke in a dazed manner, and for a few moments could not recall how it was I found myself in that room and in total darkness. I started, however, to get out, and in the darkness I wandered into the rear parlor and ran against something. I was scared almost to death, but recovered sufficiently to remember that I had a box of matches in my pocket. I ignited one of the matches—a wax match—and by its sputtering light beheld the coffin and the face of the dead girl. I knew I was not dreaming, and it was then I uttered the scream which you overheard, and by the aid of a second wax match I found my way to the hall and so to the street door, and finally to the street, and it was then that you saw me make my exit. On the day following I went down to that house, my face hidden behind a veil, and again at night I went there desiring to learn what I could, and determined in the end to secretly call the attention of the police to the place, and it was while watching the house on my second visit at night that I met you. This is my story, and every word I have told you is the truth.”

Jack listened with the deepest interest; it was certainly one of the strangest experiences that had ever

come under his observation. He did believe every word the girl had told him and he so assured her, and then he added:

"Have you decided upon any solution of the mystery?"

"I have not."

"Would you recognize the elderly lady who met you?"

"I would not."

"And what did you intend to do?"

"I intended to note who went in and came forth from that house, and then I intended to send an anonymous note to the chief of police."

"One fact is assured: you were drugged."

"Yes, by some subtle gas that permeated the room, for I drank nothing; but I know I was thrown into a condition of unconsciousness."

"Yes, and I think I know the character of the subtle substance which threw you into unconsciousness, but that does not matter now. Who is the dead girl? Did she die a natural death or was she murdered? Did they intend to murder you, and if so what was their purpose?"

"I cannot tell; it is the most strange and mysterious incident that ever occurred. I never read of anything as strange and weird as my own experience."

There was a strange glitter in the eyes of Jack. He was a great wizard and he knew of a subtle gas which could be thrust unobserved under the nostril of an intended victim, and its effects would be to throw the party attacked into a death-like slumber. That part of it was no mystery to the young magician, as stated, but what could have been the object and purpose of making Miss Smyth a victim. There was the mystery, and we will here admit that a weird suspicion was rising in his mind, and he believed one of the most atrocious of all crimes had been the secret purpose. After some little time given to thought Jack said:

"Miss Smyth, I am about to ask one favor: do not communicate with the police, do not mention your experience to a living soul, leave the solution of this mystery to me. I trust I am the only one to whom you have confided your story?"

"You are."

"That is good; the chances are that not only one crime has been committed but numerous crimes."

"Are you a detective?"

"Not a regular detective, I am a sort of amateur detective, and I do not believe there is a person on earth better capable of solving this mystery than myself. Some day you shall know my grounds for making this declaration. I promise you the mystery shall be solved and the crime punished, if indeed a crime or crimes have been committed. I will ask one more favor: do not for the present search further for a position."

The girl looked puzzled and asked:

"Why should I remain idle?"

"There are reasons."

"But I am running out of funds; my little stock of money is nearly exhausted."

"You need give yourself no uneasiness on that score."

Miss Smyth blushed and there came a flash to her beautiful eyes, as she said:

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Do not misunderstand me, Miss Smyth, I have considerable influence. I will be able to secure a position for you, an excellent one that will amply remunerate you for your services, and one that will be perfectly agreeable to you."

"You are very kind."

"I will be glad to aid you in this direction; but, Miss Smyth, if my suspicions are correct, we will need your

services indirectly in solving this mystery, and that is why I ask that for the present you do not seek further for a position. And now I will escort you to your home, and it may be that I will desire to communicate with you later on. Will you feel free to meet me should I drop you a line and request an interview under the same conditions under which we have met this morning?"

"I shall hold myself in readiness to aid in the solution of this mystery in any way that I can."

"It is very remarkable that you should have recovered from the condition of unconsciousness as quickly as you did."

"Then you know something of the nature of the subtle influence that threw me into unconsciousness?"

"I think I do; but let me ask where were you at the time you recovered consciousness?"

"I was in the same room where I had met the lady, but I was lying on a cushion and a shawl had been thrown over me."

"Yes, I see," commented Jack, "this all shows design."

CHAPTER VI.

A SENSATION IN A MORNING JOURNAL—A MISSING HEIRESS—
JACK'S SUSPICIONS—A CONNECTING LINK—A LITTLE TRICK
—THE TRAMP—TWO TRAMPS—A GREAT CHANCE FOR GOOD
DETECTIVE WORK—"WHO WILL WIN."

JACK escorted Miss Smyth to her home and after giving her certain directions he returned to his own lodgings. It was our hero's rule to read the morning papers before going abroad. Upon the morning when he went to meet

Miss Smyth he had failed to do so, and upon arriving at his home he took the morning paper and glanced over it, and immediately a paragraph met his glance which set him to speculating.

In the paper there appeared a sensational account of the disappearance of a young girl. No motive could be assigned for the disappearance. The girl was the ward of a well-known lawyer; she was an heiress. It was not known that she had any love affair—indeed, the disappearance and its cause was the most baffling character as concerned possibilities or motives. A large reward was offered for any information that would lead to her finding, dead or alive.

There were many particulars not necessary to record. The girl was described as very attractive, of a cheerful disposition, and great stress was laid on the statement that there was no known cause for her involuntary secret-
ing of herself, and the idea that she had made away with herself was scouted.

It was stated that some of the best detectives in the city had been employed on the case, and it was accepted as a fact that she had been abducted.

Jack read over the account several times, and it was not strange that he should have instantly associated the missing girl with the beautiful corpse he had seen in the vacant house.

Our hero was not one to act rashly; he was very deliberate in all his movements, and again, owing to the fact that the *girl was dead* he appreciated the difficulty of tracing her and establishing her identity. He resolved not to communicate directly with the missing girl's friends, but work around and make the acquaintance of one of the detectives.

There was a picture of the missing girl published in

several of the daily papers, but Jack knew how little reliance can be placed on newspaper portraits. He determined in his own mind to manage to behold a veritable photograph of the girl.

Of course he here again recognized the difficulties. He had only glanced at the face of the dead girl, and it would have required a closer study to recognize the resemblance between a dead face and a living one. Still there remained the possibility of establishing a general resemblance. As far as he could judge the age of the missing girl and the dead girl would agree, and again, the mysterious disappearance. Here was a very suggestive feature of the case in connection with the experience of the beautiful Miss Smyth, but for an accident, as our hero had reason to know, there would have been a second mysterious disappearance of a beautiful young lady, and we can add that Jack was in a way to arrive at certain conclusions that would not have been likely to have been suggested to any one else. He realized that he had a great job ahead of him, and one possibly that would call for a display of all his magical powers in the most novel and wonderful manner.

Our hero sent a note to Miss Smyth requesting her to meet him in the park on the following morning, and then he went further—he visited the reading room of one of the great hotels. He desired to listen to the several ideas as concerned the case, and he knew that he was pretty sure to hear such discussion in a great barroom. Later he conceived a very cunning idea; he recalled that a large reward had been offered, and he desired to make the acquaintance of a first-class detective engaged on the case. He went to his home after hanging around the hotel reading room for an hour or two, and when in his home he got himself up in a very scientific manner for

the plan he had determined to carry out. His main desire was to make the acquaintance of a detective under peculiar conditions, and having made himself up he proceeded to the office of the lawyer who had been the missing girl's guardian, and to whom, as advertised, all information was to be conveyed.

Jack had no difficulty in finding the office. He rapped at the office door—did not enter as he could have done, but, as stated, rapped on the door. It was opened by a lad of whom he inquired:

"Is this the office of Mr. Stuart?"

"Yes," came the sharp answer.

Jack looked like a miserable tramp, and the lad did not feel called upon to be very courteous.

"Is the gentleman here?"

"I'll see."

The lad stepped inside and told Mr. Stuart that an old tramp was outside and desired to see him. Mr. Stuart was a shrewd man; he was looking out for tramps just about that time, and he said:

"Show the gentleman in."

"He is not a gentleman, sir, he is a tramp," said the lad.

"Show the man in," came the imperative command in a half-impatient tone.

The lad "fell to himself," as the saying passes, and going to the door said:

"Come in."

Jack entered.

"You will find Mr. Stuart in the far office there."

Jack shuffled through the suite of offices and entered the office where a shrewd-looking gentleman of about fifty was seated at a desk.

"Be you Mr. Stuart?"

"That is my name."

"Are you the gent who has offered a reward for news of a young girl that is missing?"

"I am the party."

"I wish to ask a question, sir."

"Very well, proceed."

"What is the amount offered?"

"One thousand dollars."

"That ain't much."

"I should think it would be quite a sum for you."

"No, sir, it's worth more."

"How much?"

"Five thousand at least."

The lawyer eyed his brawny visitor very critically, and finally said:

"We might pay more for positive information."

"The amount offered was really five thousand dollars."

"Well, we'll pay five thousand for positive information."

"Yes, that is what you've offered already."

"Oh, you know then what we've offered?"

"Of course I do."

"Why did you ask?"

"I think the amount should be doubled."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, it's a great case."

"Let me see," said the lawyer, "I will go out and speak to a gentleman who has the matter in charge, and learn if he is willing to pay a larger sum."

Mr. Stuart left the office and there came a triumphant look to the tramp's face. He realized that his cunning trick was working just right.

Mr. Stuart went outside and exchanged a few words with one of his clerks, and then hastily wrote a note which he ordered to be given to Mr. —— as soon as he arrived, and upon returning to his private office he said:

"We will pay a larger reward upon condition that the information leads to decided results."

"What do you call decided results, sir?"

"I mean the discovery of the missing girl alive."

"Why, certainly, yes; and how will the money be paid?"

"In gold or bills when it is earned."

"I don't mean that."

Jack was talking for time and so was the lawyer.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there might be a little risk."

"A little risk?" repeated the lawyer.

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, you know, you are a lawyer."

"Have you any information, my friend?"

"I am not speaking for myself."

"Oh, you are not?"

"No."

"Who are you speaking for?"

"I've a suspicion."

"You have a suspicion?"

"Yes."

"What is your suspicion?"

"Well, I know a party who may know something."

"What makes you think this party knows something?"

"I've known him to be in jobs of this kind."

"Jobs of what kind?"

"Adventures and such like—yes, he's a 'dandy' on such jobs. I'll bet he can give some information, but he is very shy; he plays off, see? He don't take any

chances, but I reckon I might work a few facts out of him if I know everything is all right."

"All right, how?"

"Well, you know."

"I don't."

"You see, the reward might be paid and then you might jump on a fellow, see? Now he ain't taking any chances. He might want the money, but he will be scary of being jumped on, see?"

"Yes, I see; and if the girl is returned alive your friend need have no fear; if she is dead he will have to prove that he did not have a hand in her death. But who is your friend?"

"Oh, I am not giving him away until I know the road is clear."

"When will you know?"

"I will see him."

"When?"

"To-night."

"And then?"

"I will come back and see you."

"When will I see you again?"

"To-morrow if there is anything in it. You know I am not promising dead sure, but I think I am on to this case."

"How about the missing girl?"

"Oh, I don't know anything about her yet."

"What do you suspect?"

"In what way?"

"Is she dead or alive?"

"My idea is that you will never know anything more about it unless the girl is alive, see?"

The latter was what is called a very "cagey" answer; and the lawyer so recognized it.

"Then you will report here to-morrow?"

"I may, I won't promise for sure."

"You will if you have anything to report?"

"Yes."

"At what hour?"

"Can't tell, according to circumstances."

Jack and the lawyer held some further conversation in line with what we have recorded, and then our hero departed. As he passed through the main office he saw a man sitting at a table apparently writing, but he knew that the man was the detective that Mr. Stuart had telephoned for from a neighboring office, and mentally our hero concluded:

"Good enough; that is the man with whom I am to have some fun during the next twenty-four hours."

As the door closed behind Jack, Mr. Stuart stepped from his office and asked, addressing the detective:

"How long have you been here?"

"Ten minutes; I happened to be in the office when the telephone rang up. I came right around."

"Then you heard some of the talk?"

"I did."

As the detective said "I did" he left the office; but as he walked out he was a different-looking man than the one Jack had seen sitting at the desk.

Our hero went down in the elevator; the detective went down the stairs three or four steps at a leap, and he arrived at the bottom stair just as Jack passed out of the building. Jack had lingered; the detective thought the fact lucky, he did not suspect it was design. Jack leaped on a car and the detective jumped on the same car. Our hero alighted at Fourteenth Street and went into the park and sat down on a rustic bench, and he remarked:

"I'll give him a chance."

Our hero had been seated but a few minutes when a tramp-like looking man took a seat on the same bench. The tramp number two did not speak to tramp number one immediately, but after a time he said:

"Say, comrade, can you lend us a cent."

"Lend you a cent?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I want to buy a biscuit; I'm hungry."

"That's my case."

"You haven't any money?"

"No."

"Let's put our capital together and go into business."

"A good scheme; where shall we open up?"

"I say, but it's hard for chaps like us these days."

"You bet it's hard."

Jack and the tramp conversed for two hours; the detective proved himself a very patient man. Evening came apace, the street lamps flashed forth when our hero arose and said:

"Well, comrade, I'll bid you good-evening. I've had a good rest and a pleasant time with you; I am to meet a comrade who will have a few pennies and I may get a roll and a cup of coffee. Hope you'll have the same luck."

Jack proceeded along and met a man who was fairly well dressed. He had arranged to meet this man at the time. He returned to his home and prepared for the game he had in hand, and when he joined his friend, in a few words he explained the situation, and he and his friend proceeded to an old-fashioned basement eating saloon, one of the few old-timers existing in New York, where there were eating booths ranged on one side of the apartment. Jack and his friend entered a booth at the

far corner of the room and called for their rolls and coffee. They had been there but a few moments when a man entered and occupied the adjoining booth, and Jack winked significantly to his companion and said:

"I called on that lawyer man."

"And what did you make out?"

"He's playing it nice; he is on the catch."

"He is?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"While I was there he went out of the room to see a man."

"Well?"

"He played it nice; he sent word for a cop and thinks he put up a job on me, but, Tom, old man, I ain't a weasel, and you never can catch me asleep, see?"

CHAPTER VII.

GOING TO CAMP IN A LUMBER YARD—A VISITOR—A DETECTIVE SEES A LITTLE MAGIC—AN EXPLANATION—AN UNDERSTANDING—A REASON WHY—THE PHOTOGRAPH—A MUTUAL RECOGNITION — STARTING IN TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY — A DETECTIVE LESSON.

JACK and his friend made no further allusion to the visit to the lawyer. They ate their rolls and coffee and left the saloon, and a little later separated. Jack wandered off down toward the river front, and soon he became aware that he was being followed. He turned into a lumber yard, sought out a cozy place, and acted like a man who was preparing to camp for the night, and in a few moments he was joined by a man who demanded:

"Hello, what are you doing there?"

"Resting, my friend, resting, that's all."

"You can't rest here."

"I can't?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"You can't, that's all."

"I will."

"Get out of here or I will call the police."

"You will call the police, eh?"

"Yes, I will."

"That's all right; call the police and I'll show you what I will do."

"You will?"

"Yes, I will."

"What will you do?"

"I'll expose you."

"You will expose me?"

"I will."

"What will your exposure be?"

"Oh, I know you."

"You know me?"

"Yes, I do."

"What do you know about me?"

"The police are after you already."

"The police are after me?"

"Yes, sir."

Jack spoke in a quiet, matter-of-fact way.

"My friend, you are crazy."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no, I am not crazy, I am a devil—yes, sir; and I am glad I've got you—yes, got you right here. I've been looking for you, and I'll tell you why. There is a

young lady missing; there is a big reward offered for the solution of the mystery; I want to solve the mystery and get the reward, and I've been on your track."

"On my track?"

"That's it sure—yes, I was on the lay for you in the park. You were the tramp who took a seat along side of me; you followed me into the saloon where I ate my rolls; I've been baiting you. I came down here knowing that you were on my track. I've got you now, and if you want to save your life you will tell me just where the girl is. I don't want any dead girl; I want a live girl. I know you—yes, sir; you called on Stuart to-day to find out all about the reward. I know what your game was. You know about the girl and you want to make sure that you can get away with the reward and not run any risks, but you'll never get the reward. I've got you down fine; you know where the missing girl is and I want you to tell me, or by George, you will see things that you never expected to see."

The detective who had been baiting Jack was an old and experienced man, one of the best on the force, and he was a surprised detective—indeed, at that moment he had encountered the surprise of his life in one direction. Never before had he been so taken aback by a man whom he was "shadowing," and despite the fact that he was a brave and experienced man he just stood and gazed in amazement, but finally he managed to exclaim:

"Well, you have got a cheek."

"Do you think so?"

It was about all the detective could say, he was so amazed—indeed, really bewildered by the effrontery of the man, but he appreciated that he had an extraordinary man to deal with, no ordinary rogue.

There followed a moment's silence, when Jack said:

"Why don't you call the police?"

"I'll take care of you without the police."

"You will?"

"I will, I am satisfied that you are the coolest rogue I ever met."

"You call me a rogue?"

"Yes, I do; and I propose to make you own up before I am through with you."

All the detective's original plans had been upset by the incident we have related—indeed, he hardly knew what move to make. It had been his intention to trail and "shadow" his man, and when he accosted him it was only to draw his man out. Well, he had drawn him out with most startling results.

"So you will make me own up that I am a rogue?"

"I will."

"Would that be any satisfaction to you? If so I will own up that I am a rogue—as big a rogue as you are."

The detective determined to bring matters to a head, and drawing a revolver he said in a menacing tone:

"I want you to go along with me."

"I am not going with you, but you are going with me. I make a serious charge against you—yes, sir; you set this lumber yard on fire; I saw you do it."

Jack had hardly spoken the words when the detective was dazzled in a blaze of light. He was like one surrounded by a furious blaze, and he was blinded, unable to move. He stood paralyzed for fully twenty seconds, when suddenly the blaze vanished and the two men stood facing each other, and Jack said:

"You villain, it is lucky I am here or we would have had a big conflagration. So you are an incendiary, eh, as well as a child stealer? But I'll fix you—yes, I'll fix you; I'll 'take you in,' you rascal."

The detective had run up against all manner of experiences during his career on the force, but on the occasion we describe he had run up against the most startling of them all. He sought to raise his pistol when bang! bang! there occurred several explosions right in his face. He at first naturally thought that he had been shot at, but when the explosion ceased he knew that he was uninjured, and again he sought to raise his pistol, when he found that he was absolutely helpless; his arm was as though dead; it hung lifeless at his side. Then he was enveloped in a cloud of smoke and the life returned to his arms, and when the smoke cleared away he found that he was standing alone; the wonderful tramp had disappeared.

The situation was indeed a thrilling and startling one. The detective was not struck by any sense of superstition; he was too well posted; but he did know that in the tramp he had encountered the most marvelous magician that ever performed a wonderful trick.

The detective knew there was no need to look for the magician; he had been beaten that was certain, and he was convinced of a second fact. The magician had some purpose in the game he had undoubtedly played. The detective dismissed the idea that the man was a rogue, and yet he knew the wonderful individual had some game, and a game in connection with the quest for the missing girl, or else there was suggested as a startling theory that the magician was the abductor and was playing a game to throw all pursuers and searchers off his track.

"I'll meet him again," muttered the officer aloud; "yes, I'll meet him again."

"You will sure," came a voice, and the next instant a man, not in any way resembling the tramp, stood before

him. But the detective knew that the man who faced him and the pretended tramp were one and the same.

"You are a smart fellow," said the officer.

"In my line—yes, I think I am against the whole world as a magician. You never saw the tricks worked before that I worked on you."

"I never did."

"I had a purpose."

"I know that."

"You and I are engaged on the same quest."

"Are you a detective?"

"I am not, I am only a poor magician."

"Don't call yourself a poor magician; you are the best I ever met. But what has been your purpose in working me?"

"I had a purpose."

"I know you did."

"And you will explain?"

"I will."

"Do so."

"I wanted to make your acquaintance, and under circumstances that would win for me confidence in my powers."

"And you are not a detective?"

"I am not, as I told you."

"You have won my confidence as far as your wonderful ability as a magician is concerned. I have run up against some very wonderful exhibitions of magic, but you outclass them all."

"And your name is?"

"Ned Kempton."

"Well, I'll call you Ned, and I will tell you why I desired to make your acquaintance. Through accident I believe I have fallen on to an incident that will aid us in

solving the mystery of the missing girl. I do not propose to take the job out of your hands, or interfere with your securing the reward; on the other hand I believe I can secure the reward for you, or at least materially aid you in securing it."

"And who are you?"

"I will be perfectly frank with you; my name is Jack Westlake. I was born in New York, but reared in India, where I learned the magician tricks."

"And you think you have a clue as to the whereabouts of the missing girl?"

"Yes, I believe I have had the sad privilege of gazing on her dead face."

"Great ginger!" ejaculated the detective, "is the poor girl dead?"

"Apparently, yes."

"You say apparently?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"Because that is the exact truth as the circumstances now indicate, but it is possible that I may have seen the girl and that she is living at this moment. One fact is certain either way: if I am on the right track you and I will solve the great mystery of the hour—one of the greatest mysteries in one direction that has ever bewildered the people of this great city of New York."

"You say you accidentally made a discovery?"

"I did."

"Will you take me into your confidence?"

"That is my intention—indeed, I have selected you to secure my confidence."

"Why did you visit Mr. Stuart?"

"I wanted to draw a detective after me, and as I told you. win his confidence."

"You played a great game."

"Yes, it was a pretty shrewd game."

"Tell me about your discovery."

Jack proceeded and related all the incidents already known to our readers. How he had seen the young girl issue from the house, and how he had entered the house and had discovered the corpse, how the latter had been mysteriously removed, and his later investigations concerning the vacant house.

"But the young girl, what of her?"

"I 'shadowed' down to her identity."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What was she doing in the house—did you learn?"

"I did."

Jack related the remarkable adventure of Miss Smyth. The detective listened attentively, and when the narrative was finished said:

"You are on to the mystery no doubt, and if all you tell me is the truth we are in the way to uncover one of the most horrible crimes of the nineteenth century, according to my idea of the affair. But there is one thing I do not understand."

"What is that?"

"You say there is a possibility that Augusta Hevlin still lives?"

"There is a possibility."

"And that is what I do not understand, for from your story I fear it was her dead face you beheld in the coffin."

"It is just here where my magical skill comes in."

"How?"

"I will not explain fully, but we have a job ahead of us. We will trace that coffin and find the dead or the living, just as the fact may be. I believe we shall find Miss Augusta Hevlin alive."

"If we do it will prove a great feat."

"Have you a photograph of the girl taken in life?"

"I have."

"I must see that, and I may arrive at a decisive conclusion."

"In what direction?"

"I will know I think whether we are to search for the living or the dead."

Jack and the detective left the lumber yard and proceeded together toward Broadway, and finally they entered a hotel reading room. These reading rooms in the large hotels in New York are a great convenience, and many a tragedy is in progress in those great corridors which never attract the attention of a mere casual visitor, and many noted characters can be seen in them at all times did a visitor have some one at hand to indicate these several personages.

Jack and the detective sat down in a corner under an electric light, and our hero asked:

"Have you the photograph of the missing girl with you?"

"I have."

Ned Kempton produced a picture, and as our hero glanced at it he recognized the features of a very beautiful girl. He studied the portrait carefully and Kempton asked:

"Do you recognize those features as bearing any resemblance to the dead girl?"

"I am under the impression that the dead girl I saw in the coffin is that of Miss Hevlin. I cannot speak positively, but an impression with me goes a great ways."

Jack and the detective held a long discussion, and it was finally determined that they would go to the vacant house and lay low. Ned Kempton being an experienced

officer was better calculated to strike a clue than our hero.

The two men proceeded to the house, and as both were skillful and alert they had little difficulty in effecting an entrance, and then Kempton set out on regular detective lines. He taught our hero more detective expertness in an hour than Jack could have acquired in a whole year of experience. Jack was a great magician; Kempton was a great detective.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINE DETECTIVE WORK—"A MAGICIAN—A GREAT MAGICIAN"—
A STARTLING INCIDENT — SPLENDID MANUEVERS — SEEKING
TO TRAP A MONSTER—BAITED AT LAST—A CHANCE TO WIN.

KEMPTON had questioned Jack very carefully, and finally remarked:

"There is no connection between this house and the two houses adjoining, but there has been visitors in this house and they have left traces behind them; and there is a house somewhere in this vicinity where the iniquity is concocted and this house is being used. We might find the house, we will; but in the meantime we will carry out a scheme. I will manage to put an advertisement in one of the morning papers, advertising for a position for a young girl."

"I see; you intend to try the decoy game?"

"Yes, I have a young lady, brave and nerry, whom we can use. If she gets an answer to the advertisement we will send her to answer it, and we will be close by and run these conspirators into a trap."

"That is the very scheme I was thinking of carrying out."

"We might run down the party or parties, but that is not all we desire to do. We want to get the evidence against them, catch them red-handed while in the very act of committing a crime, then we can force them to a confession, and indeed close right in on them."

The two detectives had been about two hours in the house. They had used their little masked lanterns, but at the moment they stood talking together, as recounted above, they were standing in the darkness. Jack was about to make a remark when Kempton suddenly grasped his arm and whispered:

"We are not alone, there is some one in this room."

Even as Kempton spoke a weird light suddenly shone in the room, and at the same instant there appeared a shadowy figure—a most appalling figure—and had the same figure been seen under the circumstances by any two men save our hero and the detective they would probably have stood paralyzed; but the phenomena was being witnessed by two remarkable men, and strangely enough, one of them was equipped to solve the extraordinary appearance's origin.

"It's great," whispered Jack to his companion, and he added:

"This scheme is opening up to me, and I will show you something remarkable ere we get out of this house. Oh, this is great; it's the triumph of a lifetime to me; it's immense."

The two men gazed with great interest and without any fear. It is possible if Ned Kempton had been alone that he might have been a little "shaky," but he had been a witness of Jack's extraordinary skill in the magic line.

At first and before Jack spoke, the detective had suspected it was a trick of his companion, but after our hero had spoken he recognized that it was to be his good fortune to witness a marvelous magical contest between two men, expert professors of the black art.

As stated, the two men stood motionless and the awful figure slowly vanished, but the instant the one dissolved a second apparition more startling than the first slowly assumed shape, and its proportions had fully outlined when suddenly there came a terrific explosion, and the shadowy and ghostly illuminated appearance was shattered as a dynamite bomb would scatter a soap bubble, and there followed an exclamation which did not come from any supernatural "thing," but a surprised mortal.

Jack and the detective both leaped forward, and at the same instant there shone in the room for a second a dazzling light which illuminated the apartments as though it were midday. Nothing, however, was revealed, and Jack and the detective drew their masked lanterns and commenced a search in every direction; but the magician who had created the startling appearance had disappeared.

"Jack," said the detective, "I do not believe you obtained the true story concerning this house."

"How so?"

"Well, I'll bet it has been vacant a long time, and there is some secret communication between this house and another one not far off."

"There is no doubt about the latter fact."

"What is your solution of what we just beheld?"

"My solution is that *there are others.*"

"What do you mean?"

"I am not the only magician around here."

"I reckon you gave the other fellow a great surprise."

"I did, and I think I can establish his identity. I have heard of him; I've got his pedigree; for there are only two of us who can produce certain effects."

"Who is the best man?"

"I think I can go several tricks over him, but I don't know what he may have picked up. You know we magicians are constant students, and he may have made discoveries that are new to me. That trick of showing the figure in air, however, is an old one, and it is easy to produce the phantom when you have the proper appliances."

"Then, according to your idea, we have identified the party connected with the mystery of the dead girl?"

"I believe we have, and more; and if my conclusions are correct as to the identity, I have reason to believe that our search is for the living and not the dead; but we will have to match cunning with cunning, for if the trickster is the party I believe him to be he is one of the most cunning men on earth, and he has shown his cunning in selecting this vacant house as the scene of his experiments."

"Experiments?" repeated Kempton.

"Yes."

"Is he a criminal or an experimenter?"

"Both."

"How so?"

"In order to make his experiments it is evident he does not refrain from what must be denominated criminal art—indeed, he is committing an atrocious crime and he knows it. He must be a monster, a merciless, cruel wretch, and it will be a good thing if we can fix some criminal act upon him, and have him put out of the way and prevent his doing more harm."

"Will you explain?"

"Not now, but in good time. Your scheme to insert the advertisement is a good one; we may run the fellow into a trap."

"What shall we do?"

"Rest on our oars."

"I think I could trail down to the mystery of this house, but we might fail to catch the rascal so as to have a clear case against him."

"That is the way I look at it. What we want to do is catch him in the act of abduction and then we will have a clear case against him. If my conclusions are true he is an inhuman wretch."

"What countryman?"

"A Russian partly, but I think his mother was an East Indian woman. He is one of the greatest linguists in the world, possessed of great wealth, but a cruel and inhuman monster; that is in case I am correct in identifying him."

"Is he a match for you?"

"We will wait and learn; I am now pitted against him, the result will tell which is the best performer. I have great confidence in my own powers and no jealousy; I claim to be human. I believe the man we are trailing is, as I have said, a monster."

"Do you think we will see any more of his performances to-night?"

"No, he is mystified with what was done to-night. That man did not previously believe he could be done by a living man. He will now move in the dark; he knows that a magician is on his track; he knows he has committed a crime; he will be very wary and he will investigate."

"Then he may not catch at our bait?"

"I believe he will, but he may adopt a different method, in some way; he is not defeated or dismayed by what occurred to-night, he is merely on his guard, and he will inaugurate a great game. We must play a greater game against him."

The advertisement was put in the paper and the detective and our hero met on the following day to await the result of their bait. Kempton said his aide, a resolute female, was all ready to act her part.

"We will not require her services," said Jack.

"Why so?"

"I will be the lady governess for the time being."

"You can make up, that is so."

"Yes, I will 'make up'—appear as perfect a woman as you ever saw."

The day passed and no answer came to the advertisement, and when Jack and the detective met in the evening the latter said:

"I reckon our 'quarry' has taken alarm; we will not catch him with our bait."

"We will wait and learn how it happens to-morrow."

On the day following Jack went to the post-office station to apply for a letter. He was gotten up as a female and it would have taken a wondrously smart person to have gone under his disguise. Our hero received an answer to the advertisement; a letter was handed to him—a letter very curiously marked.

Jack did not wait to leave the office but opened his missive at once. He read:

"Miss A. B.: Have seen your advertisement. A lady is at present under consideration; she may not prove satisfactory. You will find a letter to-morrow in case the writer is not suited and desires an interview with you; an address will be given."

The letter was signed J. E. C.

Jack stepped forth and proceeded to the place where he was to meet the officer. Ned Kempton had disappeared and Jack did not see him until late in the evening; he had received a message some time previously. When Jack met the detective he saw that there was a bright smile on his face, and Kempton said:

"You got a note?"

"I did."

"Did you see any one around when you received your letter?"

"I was not looking."

"No, but I was."

"Aha! and I was watched?"

"Yes."

"A decoy letter then was sent to the office?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"I was on the lookout; I saw that you were being watched, and when you left the office the watcher followed you, and I followed the watcher. You were followed for hours, and finally tracked to your home."

"That is bad."

"No, it is all right—just right. That man followed you to make sure you were not a decoy, and as good luck would have it, you acted in just the right manner to mislead him."

"So it was a man who 'shadowed' me?"

"Yes."

"Did you note his appearance?"

"Did I? you bet I did; and I did more, I located him. We are dead to rights on your magician."

"Then our baiting turned out all right?"

"Yes, and we could 'close in' on the rascal. But what

I want is to carry out my first idea and run him down right in the act when he is in the midst of a criminal act. And now where do you suppose I located him?"

"Somewhere in the vacant house."

"In the house directly in the rear of the vacant house, and I will explain a mystery to you. Now the house where your magician lives was once occupied by the king of counterfeiters, and they also occupied the vacant house, and there is a tunnel connection between the two houses. It was a great many years ago that the gang occupied the two houses and the circumstances had slipped my mind for the time being, but when I 'shadowed' that man down I recalled the incident. It was understood that the owner of the two houses, after the capture of the counterfeiters, closed up the tunnel connection, but this man must have discovered the old tunnel. He is possibly either the owner or lessee of both houses. He keeps the one vacant as a blind, and in the other he resides; he lives in that house with two Italian servants, a man and woman. He has lived there for over a year, and I have learned that the vacant house has stood vacant for a year; I believe he is a purchaser. You say the magician whom you suspect is a very rich man and that suspicion leads me to the conclusion that you are right in your determination as to the man's identity. He is supposed to be a professor; he makes no acquaintances and has been the subject of a great deal of curiosity, but nothing is known against him. I believe he is your magician beyond any doubt, and I repeat, he must own the two houses."

"If your conclusions are correct we will find either the living or the dead girl somewhere in one of those houses. I fear now that we may find her dead; his experiments may have proven a failure; the girl may have really died."

"You are speaking in riddles, Jack."

"Yes, I am really communing with myself, and I repeat, I fear a terrible discovery; but we have one slight hope remaining to us."

"I wish you would explain."

"I will explain everything in good time; but what is our next move?"

"We will wait and see if you get the second note. If he plays the abduction trick on you we will have him just where we want him, if not we will force an entrance into the house and make a search for Miss Hevlin."

"We will find the girl or her body, unless by some chemical process he has destroyed it; even then we will find evidence and proofs on which we can hang him. And if he has murdered that poor girl in the interest of science, as he calls it, he is no less a murderer than if his purpose had been mere robbery or revenge or any other motive."

On the day following Jack, still gotten up as a female, called at the post-office sub-station and inquired for a letter, and lo, there was a letter which read as follows:

"If Miss A. B. will call at No. — — — Street she will meet the lady who is seeking a companion, as the writer intends to start for Europe. Miss A. B. will please call at 9 o'clock this evening. Inquire for Mrs. Artemus."

This letter was signed: "A. G. Artemus."

Jack had received his instructions and proceeded direct to the home of Miss Sara Smyth, where, as good luck would have it, he had gone on the previous occasion after having received a letter from the sub-station.

Jack had kept Miss Smyth informed concerning all the moves that had been made, and the young lady who had so fortunately escaped becoming a victim of the malign

ant magician had been co-operating in the scheme to trap the monster.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER A DISGUISE—IN THE DEN OF A MURDERER—TWO GOOD
MAGICIANS FACE EACH OTHER—THE FEATURE OF A SUBTLE
INFLUENCE—A STARTLING UNMASKING—A TERRIBLE CHARGE
—“ IF LIFE HAS BEEN SUSPENDED, REANIMATE OR DIE.”

NINE o'clock was the hour set for Jack to call at the house indicated, and as it proved it was the very house occupied by the professor. There was a meeting between Jack and the detective, and all the arrangements were completed for a grand “close in” in case circumstances warranted the stroke.

At the appointed time, well gotten up and perfectly equipped for the adventure, Jack appeared at the house of the professor, and in answer to his summons a servant appeared at the door and made the inquiry:

“Are you the young lady who was to call concerning the position as companion?”

“I am the lady.”

“Will you please walk in?”

Jack obeyed without a tremor. It was to be a clear case of diamond cut diamond, as was indicated.

Our hero was shown into a rear room. Unlike the house into which Miss Smyth had been ushered our hero found himself in an elegantly furnished residence. There was every evidence of wealth and taste, everything was in accord with what might be expected in the home of one rich enough to require a companion in a trip abroad.

Jack was permitted to wait a long time before an elderly lady entered the room, and then he knew that he and Kempton had run down to the right party.

The old lady who greeted our hero was very pleasant, even fascinating, and she said:

“You received my letter?”

“I did.”

“You see, there was another young lady seeking the position, but her references were not satisfactory so I sent for you to come.”

“I was glad to receive your second missive.”

Our hero became aware that a devilish scheme had already been set in motion to deprive him of consciousness, but he was armed with an antidote; all the art of the sorcerer was to prove futile against a master in jugglism like our hero, and he could see a look of surprise creeping over the face of the magician, for Jack knew that he was face to face with the only master in the black art who could come any where near himself in diabolism.

Quite a pleasant conversation had been carried on while the monster was seeking to overcome his intended victim—indeed, the disguised magician had not even requested the applicant to remove her veil, but had just talked on while working her black art; but against our hero who, armed in the most effective manner against all subtle influences, the spell failed to work, and as stated, the face of the magician indicated his surprise. It was something he could not understand. His process was under ordinary circumstances an assured success. The monster became more and more surprised but kept on talking, believing possibly that his subtle, ether-like agent would eventually do its work. But there sat the visitor as bright and chip as when she first entered the room.

What the thoughts of the magician were was not learned until later on, and then when making a confession he admitted that he began to suspect that for the first time he had met a person that was not subject to the subtle influence he was exerting. The discovery was an amazing one, but no suspicion entered his mind at first and he kept on talking, hoping that spell would work in time. It failed, however, and the failure was so startling to him he determined to get rid of his visitor, and he said:

"I am glad to have met you; I will consider your application carefully and inform you of my decision later on. Will you call again in case you receive a note from me?"

"I consider myself already engaged then?"

"Oh, no, I must consider—indeed, I forgot to ask if you had references."

"I have no references."

"Then I certainly cannot employ you. I wonder that you would come here without references."

"Oh, I had a reason for coming."

"You had a reason for coming?" exclaimed the disguised magician.

"Yes."

"I cannot see what reason you could have beyond securing the position."

"I had another reason."

"And what was your purpose?"

"I desired to see a person as wonderful and renowned as you are."

The magician gave a start; under the circumstances Jack's declaration was amazing and indeed unexpected."

"I fear, miss, you have made a mistake."

"Oh, no, I have not made a mistake."

"But you suggest that I am a celebrated person."

"Why, yes, you are renowned the world over."

"Miss, are you mad?"

"Oh, no; but why should you deny that you are a wonderful person—a very wonderful person?"

The magician gazed in amazement, and there came a wicked glitter in his eyes as he said:

"You are a very bold young lady."

With perfect coolness Jack demanded:

"Why, certainly, if I was not a bold young lady I would not have come here. Do you forget we have met before?"

The magician glared with a gleam in his eyes like that of a basilisk.

"We have met before?" he repeated slowly.

"We have."

"Where?"

"Not in this house."

"Where?"

"The other house, where you work your schemes."

This was a bold, reckless challenge. There was no doubt after those words as to the fact that the visitor was there by design—some deep design. The magician was ready to rage, but he asked calmly:

"Will you tell me under what circumstances we met before?"

"Certainly."

"Do so."

"I advertised for a position as companion or governess; you answered my advertisement and made an appointment with me. I called in answer to your note; I was ushered into an unfurnished house; I met you and you talked pleasantly to me, just as you have been talking, and then I became unconscious. Fortunately I recovered consciousness and escaped, and when I received your answer to my latest advertisement I knew that it was a missive from the party who had previously answered my advertisement, and curiosity prompted me to come here and learn if I could what happened to me at the time I called previously."

"Will you remove your veil?" came the query.

"No."

"Miss, there is some deep scheme of robbery here. I can see your advertisement is merely a trick to get into houses. You cannot rob me nor involve me in any intrigue. I recognize now that you are a base, intriguer, and I desire that you leave this house immediately."

"I cannot obey you."

"You cannot obey?"

"I cannot; I came here to learn from you why I was forced into unconsciousness."

"How dare you?"

"Oh, I told you I would dare anything."

"And you refuse to leave my house?"

"I do."

"I will summon an officer."

"Do so, and I will relate to that officer what I saw the night we previously met. I will have a startling tale to tell; I've waited to tell my tale until I had seen you again. Call your officer; I am ready."

Here was defiance bold and resolute, and the magician was perplexed. He suspected some design; he did not think it possible that all the facts concerning him were known, but he did think that this young woman had really communicated with the police and that a trap had been set to catch and implicate him. He recognized it was a moment for him to play his most skillful diplomacy.

"Miss," he said, "I fear I have been brought in contact with a lunatic."

"You can dismiss any fear on that account; I am perfectly sane; but I am determined to know why I became unconscious; I am determined to learn the motive of those who reduced me by some subtle influence to a condition of helplessness. I believe you can enlighten me; I mean that you shall."

A crisis had presented itself. The last words of Jack were not simply suggestive, but plain and direct. There came a change over the face of the magician, his face became livid, his eyes brightened until they gleamed like two balls of fire. He attempted a terrible trick known to but a few magicians, but his efforts failed. He then rose, determined to resort to more natural means—desperate means. Murder raged in his heart; he was beside himself; he was a desperate and fearless man; fearless physically when facing only natural incidents. As stated, he rose to his feet, but suddenly fell back in his chair, and then there came a wild look of despair over

his face. The look of rage and anger was swallowed up in fear, for magician as he was, he had fallen under a spell more potent than any he had ever learned to exercise himself. His limbs were paralyzed, he sat helpless, and then Jack with a feeling of delight commenced to exercise his own wonderful powers. Flashes of livid light shot across the vision of the disguised magician, and the gaslight in the room was extinguished. Mocking laughter sounded in his ears, and there came an unnatural voice saying amid the light flashes:

"You have perverted the science of magic and the doom which shall come for occult forces overhangs you."

Then little reports like tiny exploding bombs sounded all around the man, then the room was brilliantly illuminated by a ball of fire which for a few seconds hung balanced in the air, and Jack could see the looks of agony which rested upon the face of the magician, and then the light was succeeded by deep gloom and a figure similiar to one Jack and the detective had seen in the vacant house floated through the darkness, and at length the agonized magician exclaimed:

"My brother, why do you torture me?"

"Aha! I torture you?"

"I am in deathly torture."

"And you should be, false minister of a grand science. Fool, monster, your cruel methods, your heartless deeds have brought torture to you also. You inveigled me here intending to make me the living vehicle of your experiments. Did you consider my torture—the torture you intended to inflict—the torture which we have proof you have inflicted upon innocent victims which have been allured into your power. The detectives could not touch you and they employed me as your superior to run you down. I am your master in the black art, you know it now, you have proof." And as Jack ceased speaking he relit the gas and calmly faced the wretch whom he had run to bay.

For a few moments the two men gazed at each other in silence. The magician knew that he had met his master, for Jack had performed wonders exceeding his own powers. It was a strange scene presented; the magician

was disguised as an old woman, and Jack sat there under the disguise of a veiled young lady, and he was the first to cast aside his disguise and stood fully revealed in his proper person, and the magician asked:

"Who are you, my master?"

"I am one who will have visited upon you the full measure of your crimes."

"My crimes—why say crimes?"

"Because you have been guilty of crimes. You are a monster, a cruel, soulless, ambitious wretch, seeking to solve a riddle in science, and in your mad, selfish desire to gratify your own ambition you have not spared the young and the innocent. And now, wretch, one question: in yonder house to which you have access through an underground tunnel there lay in a casket apparently cold in death, one of your victims. Answer me: is that victim of your insane ambition dead or living?"

The answer which came filled our hero with deepest regret. The man answered:

"She was dead when brought to me."

This answer our hero looked upon as an admission and evasion; he believed the fair girl was really dead and that the wretch had already arranged a lying tale to save himself from the consequences of a foul murder."

"She was dead when brought to you?"

"Yes."

"How unfortunate."

"Unfortunate?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Had she been living when she was brought to you she would have been living now; as she is dead you will not be able to convince the officers of the law that she was dead when brought to you, and you will be compelled, my fellow magician, to answer the charge of murder."

"It is false; I did not murder her."

"That may be, but if she is dead you will be accused of murder, for it is known that she was alive within a few hours preceding her being placed in that casket in the house which belongs to you. Man, a terrible fate

awaits you; magic will not save you when the officers of the law 'close in' on you."

The man writhed in his chair, for our hero had released him from the spell which had held him powerless—indeed, he had aged. No pen can ever describe the agony and torture through which he had passed. It is upon record that there has been cases where the hair has turned gray in one night under excruciating torture, and it was such an ordeal through which the magician was passing. We will not explain why he suffered so fearfully, believing our readers have already discerned the cause of his anguish.

"Why have you become my enemy?"

"Because one dear to me was your victim."

"That cannot be."

"I will not dispute with you."

"I have not committed a murder."

"Bah! assassins do not as a rule confess before sentence of death. Man, you can deceive no one; I am your master and the master of your secret. You have sought to establish the possibility of suspended life, and in order to carry out your deadly scheme I believe you have sacrificed many victims, but we know that you have had one victim. If you have suspended the indications of the vital spark it will be well for you, if you reanimate your victim otherwise in this line, you will answer to the charge of murder."

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

THE man whom Jack faced in this direct manner writhed mentally as his face betrayed. He read his doom; he suffered from two causes; he saw that his experiments were brought to an end, and did he fear the consequences? Alas! as circumstances proved he did not; his mental distress as will be demonstrated was the chagrin and rage of a disappointed madman.

No one can tell what might have followed had not an

interruption occurred. A man entered the room—a man with a fairly good face stepped between Jack and the magician—and as he did so he held in his hands, which were folded behind him a note, and managed to indicate that he desired Jack to take the note. Our hero did so and read in lines hastily penciled:

“Secure the man you suspect so he will not be able to do himself harm, and then meet me outside the room and I will make a revelation to you.”

The man who had given the note to Jack spoke a few words to the magician, his master as it afterward proved, and then left the room, and Jack gave a signal and Kempton entered the room. Jack explained matters to his friend and Kempton quickly and deftly clapped a pair of handcuffs on the magician and said:

“We will let you rest awhile, my friend, you are excited.”

The magician’s eyes gleamed with a terrible light, but he remained motionless in his chair—indeed the only expression lay in his eyes. Jack left the room and was met by the man who gave him the note. The man said:

“If you will come with me, sir, to another room I will explain all.”

“Lead the way, I will follow.”

The man did lead the way, and a moment later he and Jack were sitting face to face in a well furnished room, and the man said:

“My name is James Artemus.”

“You are the man who sent out the decoy note?”

“No, sir, Professor Lasto has used my name; he is a wonderful magician and has gone mad in one direction. He believes he can suspend life for months, and then reanimate the subject. Like many other madman he is exceedingly cunning—indeed, there is a weird and wonderful method in his madness, and as I have said, save in this one direction, he is sane and a wonderful man. He has one daughter, a sensible, and magnanimous woman. She has sought in every way to restrain him; I long ago advised that he be put under restraint. I feared he might in his strange delusion commit some terrible crime. He

has been exceedingly adroit in evading us, and we have feared him—feared to oppose him openly—but now it has come to such a pass that something must be done.”

“You need not worry, my friend; something will be done with him.”

“I know what you mean, sir, but I am happy to assure you that the young woman whose supposed body you saw in that vacant house is alive and well. She is his first victim; no harm has come to her as we succeeded in circumventing him.”

Jack felt a thrill of delight upon hearing this last statement, and the man proceeding said:

“Professor Lasto’s daughter is almost as great a magician as her father. She is well versed in all those subtle substances that are used to suspend life temporarily as her father, and she knows the antidotes.”

“How about that coffin in the vacant house?”

“Professor Lasto discovered a secret tunnel leading from this house into that one. He leased the house, buying off the tenants who occupied it, and used it for his purpose. The young lady you seek was his first victim; she was thrown into a condition of suspended animation, but we were watching him, and his daughter immediately administered the antidote, and we removed her from the coffin almost immediately. He had a second victim, who as it appears escaped. We have learned that since her escape; we did not know of her presence in the house, but an Indian woman who is subject to his will informed us. We have feared the worst, knowing that the night we removed the body through the secret tunnel that some one was in the house and must have made the discovery. We intended to inform you, supposing you were an intended victim, and rescue you in time, but as it appears you were an officer of the law under a disguise. Now, sir, all I ask is that you keep this whole matter quiet. Miss Lasto will pay you well and will also remunerate the young lady you have come here to rescue; she is very rich. We would have restored the young lady to her friends, but did not dare to do so until the excitement had died down, and I assure you that we had resolved to take such steps as would prevent the professor from securing any more victims.”

Jack was glad to hear this explanation; he could understand the whole thing and believed every word of the man's story. He could see now how the supposed body had been so mysteriously removed—indeed, the whole series of incidents were plain to him. He understood how an antidote could be administered to defeat the effects of another drug. It is an open secret that suspended animation can be produced for a given time—a brief period—but it is a dangerous operation. Even then happily, according to the statement of the man Artemus, in the case of the young victim it had not proven fatal.

"You say the young lady lives?"

"Yes."

"She is uninjured?"

"She is uninjured; of that you can satisfy yourself."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"Turn the young lady over to your custody, provided you will let the matter drop. We will agree to take the Professor out of the United States; we will take him to France and place him in an asylum, at any rate he will do no more harm here in the United States."

"You will insure this line of action?"

"We will, and place the amplest money security in your hands as a guarantee."

"I will be compelled to talk this matter over with the gentleman upstairs," said Jack.

Our hero proceeded upstairs from the basement room where he had held the interview with the man Artemus, and summoned Kempton to the door. The two men held a hurried conference and Kempton said, after having listened to the proposition:

"If we can verify all this man has told you we will accept his proposition. It is the easiest way to close up the matter; they will be able to prove the professor's insanity and we cannot have a lunatic punished for his acts; all we can do is have him incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, and if they will take him out of the country it is the best method of getting satisfaction. But, remember, we will accept a money indemnity for Miss Smyth; as far as Mr. Stuart's ward is concerned she will not need an

indemnity nor will I, as Mr. Stuart will pay for my services and for yours also."

"Then the best thing for us to do is secure possession of Miss Grace?"

"Exactly."

"That is for you to do; I will remain here and watch this madman."

Kempton went down to the basement where he met Miss Lasto. She had seen the man Artemus, and indeed had been a listener to his talk with Jack.

After an introduction she went into further particulars with Kempton, and finally assured him that the young lady was in perfect health, and reiterated the statement of her father's servant, that they had feared to restore the girl. It being their intention to take the professor out of the country, and then, when ready to sail, the girl was to be sent to her friends.

"Very well, madam, under all the circumstances we propose to permit you to remove your father, as I am fully convinced that he is indeed unfortunately an insane man."

"He is."

"Will you surrender the young lady to me?"

"I will."

"When?"

"At once; follow me."

The woman led the detective up the stairs and there he met Miss Grace, the missing ward of Mr. Stuart. She was attired for the street, and indeed appeared to be in perfect health. A carriage was at hand, having been secured by Artemus. The young lady was led down the stairs into the carriage, and on her way to her home she told the story of her experience. She had been proceeding along the street when suddenly she became unconscious, and recollected no more until she found herself in the presence of the professor.

We will leave it to the imagination of our readers to decide how the trick was done.

The young lady explained how she had been well treated after a second spell of unconsciousness, and subsequently how she had been held a prisoner in that house

under various pretexts—indeed, she had been let into the secret, and was consoled with the assurance that she should be returned to her friends as soon as Miss Lasto had completed her arrangements to take the professor to Europe.

It is not necessary to describe the joy of the Stuart family when the fair girl was brought to her home; but we will say that Kempton was a very proud man.

Immediately after disposing of the missing girl to her friends, Kempton proceeded to the professor's house and relieved Jack of his charge. The detective had decided to leave an officer with the family until they were safely on board a steamer bound for Europe. He did so to guard against any more tricks on the part of the madman. He did not forget either to arrange for a money indemnity for Miss Smyth and we can so far anticipate as to state that the indemnity was paid over to Kempton, and before the expiration of a week the professor's business was closed up in America and he started under charge of his daughter for Europe.

In the meantime, on the day following the discovery of the missing girl, Jack paid a formal visit to Miss Smyth. He told her all the facts and among other facts stated that the detective had exacted a monetary indemnity. At first the girl said she would not receive it, but Jack managed to lay the matter before her in such a light as to get her to agree to consider the matter.

Jack was quite proud of his achievement in solving the mystery, and he was also delighted in having made the acquaintance of such a rare and lovely person as Miss Sara Smyth.

A day or two later the indemnity money was paid over, and Jack hastened to give the same to Miss Smyth, and she received it.

Our hero spent a very pleasant afternoon with the fair girl walking in the park, and arranged to call on her the following day. He did so and was met by her landlady, who handed him a note. Jack opened his letter and read with flashing eyes:

“MY DEAR MR. WESTLAKE: I will never be able to express in words all my gratitude for your chivalrous

kindness to me. I accepted the indemnity upon your persuasion, and have decided to use it to maintain in the future my independence. I think you have already learned that I am an independent sort of a person; I have decided to leave New York. I will not tell my destination to any one, but some day we may meet again, and I know that when you learn how I have disposed of myself you will approve my action. In the meantime, believe me when I say that I shall always remember with feelings of gratitude your wondrous kindness to me.

“Yours,

“SARA SMYTH.”

Jack did not swear, but he felt like it, and there came a very glum and disappointed look to his face, and he resolved to find Sara Smyth, believing that she was laboring under some misapprehension. He had, however, solved the mystery and in a future narrative we shall relate how Jack, under the most romantic circumstances, again met Miss Smyth. In the meantime, he became interested in a second mystery in conjunction with the detective, Kempton, and the incidents our readers will find a record of in the narrative “A Marvelous Escape,”

THE END.

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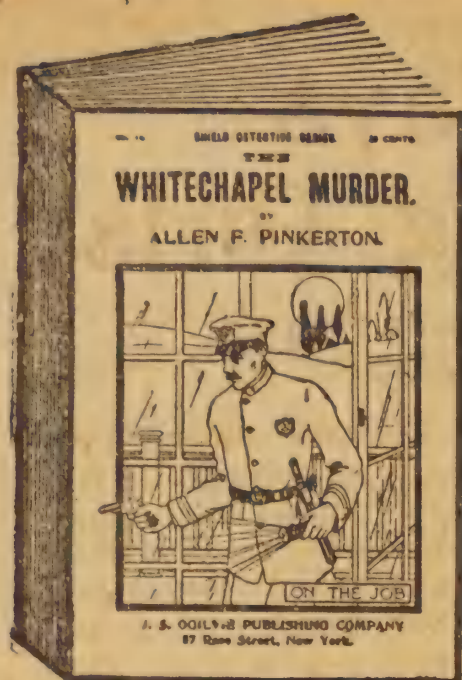
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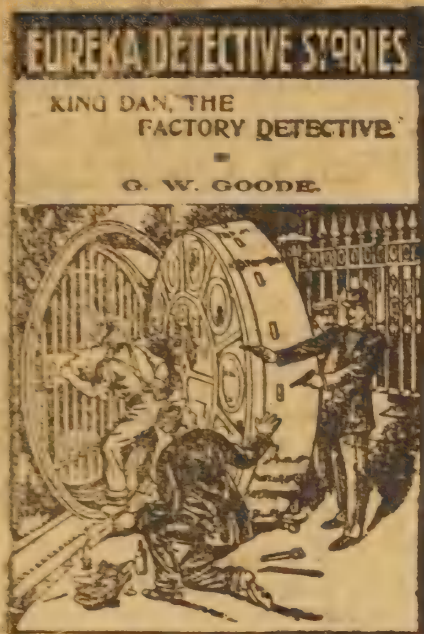
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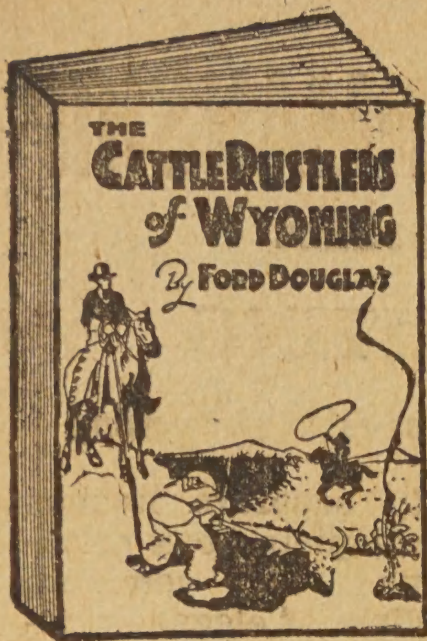
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